

Message Text

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15
ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 DHA-02 ORM-02 AID-05 OMB-01 IO-13

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R 191330Z NOV 76
FM AMCONSUL ASMARA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4237
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON
COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN
COMIDEASTFOR
NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA
NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI
CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0959

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, ET
SUBJECT: COMMISSIONER'S VIEWS ON ERITREAN REFUGEE AND REHABILITATION
PROBLEMS

1. ON NOV 19, THE DPO AND I CALLED ON THE NEWLY-APPOINTED COMMISS-
IONER OF THE ERITREAN REGION AFFAIRS SPECIAL COMMISSION (ERASC),
DR. IYOB GHEBRECHRISTOS, TO SOLICIT HIS VIEWS ON HIS COMMISSION'S
RESPONSIBILITIES. DR. IYOB WAS RELATIVELY FRANK IN HIS COMMENTS
AND ASKED THAT HIS VIEWS BE HELD IN CONFIDENCE.

2. DR. IYOB ENUMERATED THE THREE AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY OF THE
ERASC: (A) THE RESETTLEMENT AND REHABILITATION OF ERITREAN REFUGEES
CURRENTLY OUTSIDE ETHIOPIA, (B) RESETTLEMENT AND REHABILITATION
ASSISTANCE TO ERITREANS INSIDE THE REGION WHO WISHED TO RETURN
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TO THEIR VILLAGES, AND (C) REVIEW OF THE CASES OF PRISONERS WHO

WERE ARRESTED IN CONNECTION WITH THE ERITREAN INSURGENCY. WITHIN THIS FRAMEWORK HIS FIVE-MAN COMMISSION IS TO BE ASSISTED BY ALL OFFICES, DEPARTMENTS, AND AGENCIES OF THE EPMG IN THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THESE OBJECTIVES. DR. IYOB EXPECTS TO DEVOTE THE BULK OF IMMEDIATE EFFORTS TO ORGANIZING A STAFF AND DETERMINING THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM FACING HIM I.E., ASCERTAINING THE NUMBER OF PERSONS IN EACH OF THE THREE CATEGORIES, AND PARTICULARLY THE NUMBER OF PRISONERS HELD THROUGHOUT ETHIOPIA, THAT HE WILL BE CONCERNED WITH.

3. THE ERASC HAS BEEN ASSIGNED THE 60-ROOM C.I.A.A.O. HOTEL AS ITS HEADQUARTERS. SEVERAL SENIOR ADVISORS TO THE COMMISSION HAVE ALREADY BEEN APPOINTED BY THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR, INCLUDING, AS LEGAL ADVISOR, DR. YOHANNES BERHANU, A PROMINENT LOCAL ATTORNEY; CLERICAL AND SECRETARIAL STAFF IS ALREADY BEING RECRUITED LOCALLY.

4. DR. IYOB APPEARED VERY PRAGMATIC ABOUT HIS TASK, SAYING THAT WITHOUT A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT TO THE ERITREAN PROBLEM, HIS COMMISSION'S WORK WOULD BE ENDLESS. NONETHELESS, HE ANTICIPATES THAT IN ORDER TO INDUCE EXTERNAL REFUGEES TO RETURN TO ERITREA HE WILL BE REQUIRED ON OCCASSION TO TRAVEL TO NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. AS TO INTERNAL REFUGEES, HE REALIZED THE ABSURDITY OF ATTEMPTING TO CONVINCE THOSE WHO HAD FLED TO RETURN TO THEIR VILLAGES WITHOUT SOME ASSURANCE THAT THE VILLAGE WOULD NOT AGAIN BE DESTROYED IN THE FIGHTING. DR. IYOB WAS UNEQUIVOCAL THAT THE ERASC MISSION DOES NOT INCLUDE COMPENSATION FOR LOSSES RESULTING FROM THE FIGHTING, UNLESS THE VICTIM WAS ALSO A REFUGEE. HE WAS ALSO CANDID IN REVEALING THAT HIS MANDATE EXTENDS TO ERITREAN PRISONERS WHO ARE BEING HELD IN ALL PARTS OF ETHIOPIA, SOME OF WHOM HAD NOT YET BEEN GRANTED TRIALS. DESPITE THESE MANY OBSTACLES, DR. IYOB REAFFIRMED THAT HE AND HIS FELLOW COMMISSIONERS WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT CARRY OUT THESE THREE POINTS OF THE NINE-POINT DECLARATION OF MAY, 1976.

6. COMMENT: WHILE IT IS CLEAR THAT ACCOMPLISHMENT OF ERASC'S MISSION IS IMPOSSIBLE IN THE ABSENCE OF A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, THE COSMETIC VALUE OF THE COMMISSION IS UNDENIABLE BOTH INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY. DR. IYOB'S COMMENTS DID NOT CLEARLY INDICATE WHICH OF THESE AUDIENCES WAS OF GREATER IMPORTANCE IN THE DIRG'S THINKING IN APPOINTING THIS COMMISSION. DR. IYOB LIKENED HIS TASK IN A SMALL WAY TO A UN RELIEF AND REHABILITATION PROGRAM. SEVERAL

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TIMES HE MENTIONED THE UN HIGH COMMISSION FOR REFUGEES. IYOB IS NOT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS OF SETTLEMENT, MERELY THE ALLEVIATION OF HUMAN MISERY ATTENDANT TO THE INSURGENCY. HIS COMMITTEE'S OPERATIONS HOWEVER CANNOT ESCAPE BEING WEIGHED BY THE PEOPLE AS AN EARNST OF THE EPMG'S CONCERN FOR THE PLIGHT OF NON-COMBATANTS AND ITS SYMPATHETIC RELIEF OF THE VICTIMS.

7. DR. IYOB IS A SHORT (ABOUT 5 FOOT), STOCKY, MILD-MANNERED,
SOFT SPOKEN INDIVIDUAL, WITH AN EXCELLENT COMMAND OF ENGLISH. HE
TALKS EARNESTLY AND QUIETLY ABOUT THE VASTNESS OF THE TASK BEFORE
HIM OF WHICH HE IS ONLY NOW BEGINNING TO COMPREHEND ITS ENORMOUS
AND COMPLEX DIMENSIONS.

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